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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 VATICAN 000095

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 6/1/2016

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SUBJECT: HOLY SEE: IRANIAN DIPLOMAT DISCUSSES US STATEMENT, POSSIBLE EXCHANGE OF SENIOR DELEGATIONS WITH VATICAN; AHMADINEJAD AND KHAMENEI LETTERS TO THE POPE?

REF: (a) State 87682, (b) Vatican 092 and previous, (c)

CLASSIFIED BY: Christopher Sandrolini, Deputy Chief of Mission, EXEC, State.

REASON: 1.4 (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. UK ambassador met Iranian DCM June 1 and discussed Iran-US relations in light of Secretary Rice's May 31 statement. That discussion included reference to a draft letter from Ahmadinejad to Pope Benedict XVI and a possible letter from Ayatollah Khamenei, as well as Iranian interest in exchanging high-level delegations with the Holy See. Post will be reporting further in the next two days. End summary.

¶2. (C) UK ambassador to the Holy See Francis Campbell (protect) told Charge d'affaires June 1 that he had met the Iranian DCM (see para 5 below for bio info) that morning, at the latter's request. Iranian DCM said he had been instructed to seek the meeting, and took copious notes throughout. Campbell said he had chosen his words carefully, to minimize the possibility of them being inaccurately reported. He described the meeting as candid. Paras 3 and 4 below relate Campbell's account of his meeting.

¶3. (C) Iranian DCM said that Iran is looking for "even one word" from the USG acknowledging its right to a civilian nuclear program. He wondered if the May 31 announcement by Secretary Rice should be considered genuine, noting that Ahmadinejad's letter to President Bush had gone unanswered. Campbell told him to think broadly, and as an experienced diplomat to consider the potentially historic possibilities of the moment. Alluding to the pace of any potential progress, Campbell suggested that Iran should "learn to walk before it tries to run"; when the Iranian DCM cited Iran's domestic politics as a constraint on what it can say or do publicly, Campbell suggested that this applies at least as strongly to the US and other Western democracies. Campbell suggested Iran look to the example of Libya as evidence of US readiness to improve relations with former adversaries, given the right circumstances. Iranian DCM said Iran would want more in the way of security guarantees.

¶4. (C) Campbell asked about rumors that Ahmadinejad would write to Pope Benedict XVI (see ref b). Iranian DCM said "off the record" that Ahmadinejad had indeed written in his personal capacity to the pope, but that Khamenei had blocked it, saying that it would fall to him (Khamenei) rather than Ahmadinejad to write such a letter. Iranian DCM noted that Pope Benedict is less warm to Iran than had been Pope John Paul II; Campbell observed that while Benedict's style might be more reserved, his decision to treat relations with Islam in the context of culture rather than interreligious dialogue (ref C) should not be misinterpreted as a sign of coldness. Iranian DCM said his government had conveyed to the Holy See its desire to send a senior delegation from Tehran to the Vatican, and then to receive a similar delegation from the Holy See; but so far the

Holy See had not responded to the inquiry. The delegation's writ would cover a range of issues, both global and bilateral.

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BIO NOTES  
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¶5. (C) Campbell did not name the Iranian DCM but we presume it to be Ahmad Fahima. According to Campbell, Fahima is fluent in English and does most of the heavy lifting for the Iranian embassy to the Holy See (which, with seven accredited diplomats, is one of the largest such embassies; by comparison, we have six). Fahima asked Campbell for help with scholarships for his daughter to study in the UK. He also praised Ayatollah Khamenei highly at several points, and came across to Campbell as a moderate. The Iranian ambassador to the Holy See, Mohammad Farad Javidzadeh, is a scholar and a poet, considered here to be gentle and thoughtful, but not an especially effective diplomat; he speaks German but no Italian or English. In Rome since October 2004, he reportedly expected to be recalled after Ahmadinejad ascended to power, and contemplated resigning. Javidzadeh composed a poem (reportedly beautiful) about Jesus Christ and sent it to the diplomatic corps -- minus the US -- as a Christmas card.

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COMMENT  
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¶6. (C) As we have noted previously, both Iran and the Holy See regard their relationship as important. The Holy See has been acutely interested in discussing Iran with us; it appears that Iran may see its embassy here as well placed for exploring any potential dialogue with the US or Europe. The apparent confirmation of an Ahmadinejad letter to the Pope, the hint of an eventual Khamenei letter, and the Iranian interest in exchanging high-level delegations with the Holy See all strike us as remarkable -- though we defer to Department's experts on the significance of these. We would expect the Holy See to take

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such overtures seriously and to give careful thought to any possible response. With regard to Iranian DCM's comment (para 3) about US attitudes, charge noted to Campbell that Secretary Rice had explicitly acknowledged Iran's right to civil nuclear energy in her May 31 briefing.

¶7. (C) In response to demarche instruction on Iran (ref A), charge d'affaires will see Archbishop Giovanni Lajolo, the Holy See's foreign minister equivalent, on the morning of June 2. Cardinal Sodano, the PM-equivalent, was not available. In addition, UK Prime Minister Blair will meet Pope Benedict June 3 and will discuss Iran (at the Pope's request); Ambassador Rooney will see Blair shortly afterward. Post will be reporting further over the next two days.  
SANDROLINI